

Dingell predicts energy passage

By: [Alexander Burns](#)

April 23, 2009 08:39 PM EST

Michigan Rep. John D. Dingell, the former chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said the Environmental Protection Agency's decision to regulate carbon dioxide emissions as harmful pollutants Thursday would help push Congress to pass a meaningful energy reform bill.

"I think the administration's using that as a club or a whip or a goad to make the House and Senate act on this legislation," Dingell said.

Dingell also commended the current chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, California Democrat Henry Waxman, for his stance on carbon regulation — despite Waxman's having ousted Dingell from his chairmanship in a contentious November leadership election.

"We've simply got to regulate [carbon dioxide], and I want to commend Chairman Waxman and the administration," Dingell said. "They came out and said, 'We've got to have one single standard.'"

The alternative, according to the Michigan congressman, would have been persisting with a system where states set their own emissions standards, allowing every state to "screw your neighbor."

Dingell, who entered the House in 1955 and is the longest-serving congressman in American history, expressed optimism that an energy and climate bill could pass soon — if Waxman and Democratic leaders are willing to govern by consensus.

"Legislation should be done on the basis of compromise and conciliation," Dingell said. "If you're willing to take a slightly gradualist approach, we can get a bill pretty quickly."

Pressed for details on what such a bill should look like, Dingell quipped: "You would know it when you saw it. It's like beauty."

Dingell's comments came at a POLITICO/Starbucks Coffeehouse Conversations event focusing on energy issues to mark this week's Earth Day holiday. He sat down with POLITICO's chief political correspondent, Mike Allen, for a conversation at a Capitol Hill Starbucks.

It wasn't just energy on the agenda: Dingell, whose father preceded him in the House and worked on health care issues under President Harry Truman, also offered a prognosis on the coming fight over a national health care plan.

"We're the only country in the world that doesn't have it. Germany got it under Bismarck in

the 1880s, England under King Edward VII in 1907,” Dingell said. “We’re now finally getting ready to address the question.”

Dingell said that where previous efforts at health care reform focused on humanitarian concerns for the uninsured, profound economic pressures are now driving the conversation.

“Michigan produces less cars than Ontario does now. Why? It costs \$4 an hour less” in Ontario because of Canada's national health care system, Dingell said. “GM is a company that provides health care and makes cars to pay for it.”

As a result, Dingell said, the White House is in a position to score big with both energy and health care bills in one year.

“I think he will have signed both” by Christmas, Dingell said. “And I intend to do my level best to see to it that it happens.”

Dingell was less sanguine about the prospects of his home-state auto industry, saying only that a year from now, “two or ... three” of the big Detroit automakers would still be in business, and noting the swiftly approaching reorganization deadlines for Chrysler and GM.

“Yogi Berra once said, It’s very hard to prophesize when you don’t know the future,” Dingell joked, but added: “Very frankly, a bankruptcy will carry with it some awful consequences.”

Dingell was preceded at the POLITICO/Starbucks event by Brad Figel, Nike’s top lobbyist in Washington, and Mindy Lubber, president of the investment coalition Ceres, who both expressed confidence that a strong energy bill would pass Congress this year.